

The Miami Herald

Posted on Tue, Oct. 09, 2012

Miami-Dade charter changes

The Miami Herald Editorial
HeraldEd@MiamiHerald.com

Miami-Dade County voters will have seven charter amendments to consider. The first one is the most important: term limits. It sets two consecutive terms of four years for county commissioners to serve.

Miami-Dade's home-rule charter is essentially the "constitution" for the county, granting certain powers of governance to the mayor and commissioners. Since 1957, when the charter was adopted, voters have been asked at least 13 times to raise the salaries of commissioners, but they have resisted.

- This year, a majority of commissioners approved (and a charter task force recommended) that term limits be put on the ballot without tying the limits to a raise. Good thinking. Voters will be more willing to raise commissioners' woefully inadequate 1950s-era, part-time salary of \$6,000 a year in the future if they have a guarantee of term limits. Vote Yes.
- The second proposal consists of technical amendments to clarify and update names of agencies. Vote Yes.
- The third proposal would put into the charter the current county law that requires a two-thirds vote of the Miami-Dade County Commission to change the Urban Development Boundary. Ideally, a three-fourths vote would be required, but development interests pressed the task force to keep the two-thirds vote. That's still better than a simple majority. Vote Yes.
- The fourth amendment was meant to help residents create new cities after years of the county putting up obstacles to those who want more direct representation and better services. Unfortunately, the task force's recommendations went too far, taking the county out of the equation in ways that could hurt county taxpayers. The commission tried to fix this scenario with some new requirements that would give the county more say in approving incorporation, but there remain different requirements for existing cities to annex new areas versus the outright creation of new cities.

This proposal should go back to the drawing board. The county should be looking to get out of serving unincorporated areas and focus instead on managing the airport, seaport and water and sewer services countywide. But to do this right every existing city should be part of the solution and small patches of unincorporated areas between cities should be annexed. Cherry-picking the best areas for new cities and leaving the most impoverished for the county is not a solution. Vote No.
- The fifth proposed change would beef up the Commission on Ethics and Public Trust,

giving county residents the opportunity to take complaints directly to the commission to enforce current rules instead of having to go to court.

Commissioners were right to toughen this proposal in August after the task force recommended exempting certain cities from Trust oversight. Vote Yes.

- The sixth proposal would require an election within 90 days (from the current requirement of 45 days) to fill a vacancy by a county commissioner or mayor. That's a better time frame to focus on an election. Vote Yes.
- The seventh amendment would put the county commission chairman in charge of county procurement if the mayor has a conflict of interest.

The task force recommended the elected county clerk to step in, but there are various conflicts that could be created in that instance, too. The "fix" by the commission to put the chairman in charge is not a good one, creating more potential conflicts. This should be taken up by a future task force. Vote No.

© 2012 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.miamiherald.com>